

following morning he found it was changed into gold, and broke off a bit and took it off to sell. On returning, he found the bit he had broken off had grown again, and this continued till he became a very rich man. On his death the flower disappeared, and the family became comparatively poor again. The Pandan Wangi very rarely flowers (indeed I have never seen the flowers of it), and the male flowers are white and sweet-scented, like those of any other Pandanus.

Recently a Javanese who was in the Botanic gardens on a moonlight evening perceived on the stem of a wild fig-tree (*Ficus Miquelii*) at a height of about ten feet from the ground, a red flower about as big as a large marigold. Not knowing the peculiarity of the Gold flower, he went to call a companion to look at it, when it immediately vanished, nor has it reappeared. It seems that the gold flower objects to a crowd, and will only be visible to certain fortunate persons, and this coolly, by calling a companion to see it and not immediately seizing the flower, has missed his opportunity of becoming a wealthy man. It is hardly necessary to say that the flowers of the fig are enclosed in the fig itself, which is mistaken for the fruit by the natives, who imagine that fig-trees have no flowers at all but only fruits. And thus, as, like the Pandan, it has normally no flowers, it is just the kind of tree you would expect to find gold flowers on.

H. N. R.

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### Remarks on the

### Rhinoceros Hornbill (*Buceros Rhinoceros*),

and some other species mentioned in Mr. Ridley's Paper on the Birds of the Botanical Gardens.

Writing of the Rhinoceros Hornbill in his interesting paper on Singapore Birds, Mr. Ridley says, "The beak and casque are naturally white, but during life are coloured orange and red. This is done by the bird itself, which every morning rubs its beak against a gland beneath its tail, whence exudes an orange-red liquid which colours the beak."

The gland (uropygial) is *above* and not *below* the tail; below is of course a *lapsus calami*. In a letter to Mr. Ridley I told him that I thought the red colour on the bill, though

fugitive, was natural to it, and not, like the yellow, put on by the bird. Mr. Ridley considered that both colours came from the oil-gland; so to settle the question I made a careful examination of the white, bleached beak of an old mounted specimen. The bill consists of a cellular bony core of extreme lightness encased in a thin covering of horn; the casque is entirely hollow, except for a mass of bony cells at the base. The horn of the outer covering is in thin flaky layers, and it is only the outer one of these which entirely loses colour in a stuffed specimen. If it be removed, the red colour is seen to be retained, though less vivid than in life, throughout the remaining layers of the horny casing. It appears, therefore, that either the outer layer of horn is naturally red and bleaches on the death of the bird, or that it is transparent when daily anointed with the uropygial oil, allowing the underlying red colour to show through, but becoming opaque in the dried specimen.

Probably the oiling of the bill, which is common to both sexes, is as much to keep the surface from cracking or becoming brittle and flaky as for decorative purposes.

*Ægithina tiphia*, Mr. Ridley describes as resembling a goldfinch in its plumage and habits. The resemblance in habits is not very apparent. Goldfinches are gregarious, frequent open country, and feed on seeds, principally on thistle-down; the Iora goes in pairs or singly, keeps chiefly to secondary jungle or low trees, and feeds on insects, mainly caterpillars.

*Turnix plumbipes*. Describing the decoying of these quail, Mr. Ridley says, "A cock quail is put inside the cage." Surely, a hen? It is the hens that do the courting and the fighting in the genus *Turnix*. They are also the larger and most conspicuously coloured birds. I have seen numbers trapped in India and Ceylon with hen decoys, but never saw a cock used.

*Gallinago Stenura*. The name Mr. Ridley uses arose from a misprint. "*Stenura*" is correct, and has been shown to be what Bonaparte originally wrote, referring (*stenos*, narrow) to the attenuated lateral tail feathers. But this is merely a matter of synonymy, the least interesting part of ornithology.

A. L. Butler.

NOTE. Mr. Butler's remarks are very interesting, and speak for themselves, so I need only refer to the fighting quails. Since hearing from him, I have met several quail-catchers in Sungei Ujong, and examining the decoy birds find that all were females. The Malays too told me they always used the females for fighting, and the males did not fight.

H. N. R.

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### Bekin.

Regarding the Malay word "bikin" = to do, to make, etc.; —the use of which is so strongly deprecated, and the bastard origin of which is insisted upon by all authorities on the language—has the probability of its Persian origin ever been seriously considered? The word bears a striking resemblance to "bikun," the imperative of the common Persian verb "to do, to make," etc. If this origin could be established it would raise the word from its present obloquious position to one of quite classical respectability.

W. C.

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### An insectivorous squirrel.

The swarming of a nest of termites is always interesting to watch on account of the numerous enemies which hasten to the spot to prey upon these helpless insects. Birds, chiefly bulbuls, robins, drongos and bee-eaters, are the usual assailants. Dragon-flies also dart to and fro through the swarm, and frogs and toads hasten from their retreats to devour those that fall on the ground. I was surprised, however, recently on one of these occasions to see a little squirrel (*Nanosciurus exilis*) creeping about on the ground and eagerly catching the insects. On my remaining quite motionless, it crept out of the bushes upon the road where it remained about two feet from me intent on its prey, which it ate wings and all, apparently with much enjoyment, and by the rustling in the bushes I judged there was at least one more, which I could not see, attacking the swarm.

H. N. R.